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our Lord. It was the Messianic self-consciousness of Jesus that created the events of the ministry. But this Messianic self-consciousness of Jesus was probably a secret into which the disciples never truly entered. And since the life of Jesus must be reconstructed on the ground of the character and momentum of His self-consciousness, it follows that this reconstruction is impossible from the tradition of men, who never fully realized the nature and purpose of that self-consciousness. No re-arrangement of Mk. or of all the Gospels could produce a consecutive history of the life of Jesus. Mere critical questions, therefore, have little value in gaining for us a clear view and outline of the real progress of Jesus in the fulfilment of His mission. The vital problem has its centre in the conception which Jesus had of His own Messiahship, and with this is bound up His conception of the Kingdom of God. We are not chiefly anxious to get an answer to the question, 'Who do *men* say that I, the Son of man, am?' nor to the question, 'Who do *ye* say that I, the Son of man, am?' But the question to which most of all we desire an answer (if we may put a new question into the lips of Jesus) is this: 'Who do *I* say that I, the Son of man, am?'

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

What a Pity![1]

'Know you not that you are the temple of God.'—1 Co 3^{16}.

You've been hearing about St. Paul's, haven't you, and the fuss they are making about it up in London? And no wonder they are all so scared! For St. Paul's is such a wonderful place. It's so huge, for one thing. Why, your church would only make a kind of porch for it. And such great men are buried in it—Nelson and Wellington among them. And there's the Whispering Gallery, that eerie kind of place, and the great splendid dome, and above all the gold cross glistening in the sunshine. London is proud of many things. But there are very few of which she is prouder than her glorious cathedral. Little wonder when they buried Wren in it, the man who had thought it all out and built it, they cut those words above his grave, 'If you want to see my monument, look round you.' For it was a marvellous thing he did.

And now it is in danger. Something must be done, or else, not at once, and not in a few years, but some time soon, it may all crash and rumble down with a long roar into ruins. Something must be done! But they are not just sure what it should be! One thinks this, and another that, and yet another urges something else would be far better. And the people are getting fidgety. You know how you felt that day Mother was taking you to something dreadfully exciting, and on the way she met a friend, and they talked, and they talked, and they talked. 'She's coming now,' you thought. But no! they began all over again. And you couldn't keep still, were just itching to get on; pulled at her hand, but she didn't notice; spoke, but she paid no heed. Well, the people are like that. 'Oh, don't waste time talking, but do something,' they keep saying, 'or by and by St. Paul's may tumble down.' But, after all, what is it all about? And what's gone wrong? Such a wee thing, you and I would think.

That vast dome is very, very heavy. Wren knew it would be so, and that the ground beneath is soft. And so he had great pillars built to hold it up. You remember when Dad took you to the football match, or was it to see the Prince of Wales pass? Anyway, there was a crowd, and you were too small to see over. And so Dad swung you up on his shoulder, where you could see splendidly. But every now and then you asked him if you were not getting heavy. And he laughed, and said he could carry you all day.

So the pillars should have been able to hold up the dome quite easily. But some one scamped his work. They look quite solid, these huge pillars, as if made of solid stone as they were meant to be. But they are not! The outside is quite solid. But within there is only a mass of soft rubbly stuff that is crumbling a little. And that is what is

[1] By the Reverend A. J. Gossip, M.A., Aberdeen.

causing all the bother. Isn't that a pity? And doesn't it seem stupid. They took such pains to build a glorious thing, and, just for the lack of a very little more pains, it may all be spoilt. The Cathedral is splendid, the dome is splendid, everything is splendid. But because the pillars were scamped, everything may be lost. That is what often happens.

Suppose you were playing a football match against an older and heavier team. And suppose you played up well, even scored indeed; and then during the last five minutes tired and let them score and score again, and win after all. That would be a pity, to play so well, and lose for lack of such a little more.

Or you remember that night you couldn't get a sum to work out right, tried and tried, got all inky and smudged and mixed up. And then at last you got it. But you were so tired and sleepy by then, with your eyes half-shut, that you wrote it out in a hurry, didn't take it down right, and got no marks after all. What a pity, to lose all your pains for lack of such a little more!

But there is worse than that! Long, long ago God thought of something splendid, of just about the nicest thing even He ever thought about. It was to be a boy (or was it a girl?). Anyway it was to be a splendid girl, or a splendid boy, just the nicest even God could make. And He planned a strong little body for him. Or perhaps it wasn't very strong. She was to be a cuddly wee kind of girl. And He thought out such a merry laugh for him (or was it her?) and such happy sunny ways. Every one was to like her (or was it him?). I am so stupid I can't ever remember though you have told me twice already. And God worked and worked and worked for, oh, so long! And at last it all came true! And there was—*You*. For you were the boy or you were the girl. But oh, what a pity, something surely has gone wrong! Are you as nice as you were meant to be? Aren't you a wee bit tempery, and cross and sulky? Aren't you a little grabby and selfish now and then? Here was a Temple that was to be so lovely; and God took such pains in the making of it. And is it all going to be spoiled because the little bit of work left for you to do is being bungled? What a huge pity that would be!

Oh well, you say, it's only temper, only a little thing that doesn't matter, a flash and it's over. I know. But think of this. One wise man tells us this about St. Paul's. You know what an inch is? From the tip of your finger up to the first joint, or even the second, isn't very far. Well, that's an inch. And, if you could make that into a thousand pieces, none of them would be very big. Even three of these wee bits would be quite small, all three of them together. Well, this man tells us —and I suppose he knows—that all that is the matter with St. Paul's is really that the pillars have given three-thousandths of an inch. And all this fuss has started over that! I know that it's a flash of temper, and it's over. I know that it's a case of sulks, and then the sun comes out. A wee thing, yes, but it's spoiling the whole Temple. And we must put it right at once, or it may all rumble down.

The wise men aren't quite sure what is best to do about St. Paul's, and who could mend it best. But we know where to go, and are quite certain who can help us most. We'll go to Jesus Christ, with those clever hands of His that could straighten what had bent crooked, and heal whatever had gone wrong. And we'll tell Him we have made a mess of things, that we are cross and tempery and selfish, that the bit of the Temple we were left to do is all quite spoiled. And He will put it right for us. But—we must lose no time.

Entertaining Angels.[1]

'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.'—He 13^{2}.

We all like to be visited by friends from time to time. We look forward to seeing them because we know their ways and they know ours, and when they arrive it is such fine fun recounting to each other all that has happened to us since last we met.

But our friends were not always friends. At one time they were strangers to us. So it is that now and again we meet people whom we know perhaps only by name. But, having met them, we seem to like them. We are glad to have them with us in our homes, and we do our best to make them happy. Little by little we win each other's confidence as we come to know each other better. Perhaps we are drawn to them because we admire their conversation; or perhaps we like the way in which they always play the game. Soon we know that our world is better just because they

[1] Rev. James Nicol, Tealing.

have a place in it. We feel that it has been good for us to have met them and made friends of them. It would seem as if they have come into our lives as messengers bringing us good things—surely, that is to say, we have been entertaining angels unawares.

One day a man was sitting at the door of his house, which happened to be a tent. It was very hot, for it was noon in an eastern land, and, besides, he was an old man—so he was resting. Suddenly he saw three men, strangers to him, approaching him. They had fine faces, open, bright, and frank, and they carried no weapons of war. The old man rose to meet them and give them a welcome. He bade them be seated, he refreshed them, and advised them to rest. And then, later on, this kindly host, whose name—of course you knew it right away—was Abraham, discovered to his great surprise and to his great joy that the men were angels. That was a fine discovery to make—Abraham had been entertaining angels unawares.

Again, one of the old Latin poets tells us a similar story. In a little humble cottage lived an old couple, who, had they been modern folks, would have been called, I am sure, Darby and Joan, but whose Latin names were Philemon and Baucis. They lived very good lives, and their home was always so neat and clean, that they were never ashamed to welcome any visitor. One day they had a stranger at their door, whom they entertained as well as their humble lot would allow. Then they learned that their visitor was no less a person than one of the gods. Unknown to them, they had been entertaining not an angel, but a god.

The usual guests whom we welcome to our homes are common, ordinary people. But now I want you to think of other guests whom we receive into another kind of home—the home of our minds. Into our minds each one of us often asks certain guests to enter, and these guests are our thoughts. Now, when Abraham and that old couple of whom I told you welcomed their visitors to their homes, they were pretty certain that they would do neither their homes nor themselves any harm. Had the strangers been wicked-looking men, they would have let them pass. So, before we invite any thoughts to stay with us, we shall be very wise, first of all, to make certain that they will not do us any harm. A beautiful thought or idea we recognize at once, and we are glad to have him. We talk with him, we consider him, and we come to like him. He grows upon us. We like to think how good a guest he is. There once lived in Australia a Scots minister named John F. Ewing. His mind was a home where he entertained as guests many beautiful thoughts. As a result he so loved little children that, when he died, the little ragged urchins of Toorak could scarcely, for tears, lay upon his grave the wreath they had given their pennies to buy. And then it is told of another man who loved boys and girls, and who in return was loved by them, namely, of Henry Drummond, that 'his life was the home of fair visions and noble thoughts and courteous, kindly deeds.' These men, during their whole lives, were entertaining angels, although perhaps they did not know it, and so to others they became beautiful and lovable. So, when we entertain such visitors as these fair and good thoughts in the home of our minds, we are, even if we do not know it at the time, entertaining angels, for surely these are messengers from God.

Now I want you to think of the great difference these guests make to us. Visitors always leave some impression upon us. We feel that life is not just the same as it was, the difference being due to their presence with us. But when our guests leave us, they too are different. They have been talking with us, playing with us, learning from us, and, perhaps, copying us. So they must be different. Therefore, when these beautiful and noble thoughts leave us, they cannot but be different. They came to us as messengers of God, and it is our business to send them on their way to keep doing God's work. But how do we do this? A man called Watts, at one time when things must have been looking fairly black for him, welcomed to his mind the thought called Hope. He only knew that at that time it was a thought worth welcoming, and he found that the more he entertained it in the home of his mind, the brighter his outlook became. Then it occurred to him that that was a thought worth giving expression to that others might benefit from it, and so he took his brushes, for he was a great artist, and painted a famous picture which all the world knows and loves, the picture to which he gave the name of 'Hope.' The great thought, at first a stranger, had come to him as a messenger from God; it lived in the home of his mind for a time. Then, when his guest left him, Watts himself was a better man, and the guest went on still to do God's work in giving to the

world the great lesson the artist himself had learned.

So it is in other spheres. To the poet's mind there comes a beautiful thought which remains his guest for a while, and when that thought leaves the poet, it is not simply a thought, but a thought clothed in the finest of language. Thus, one poet, thinking of God's great goodness, wrote the 23rd Psalm, while others speak to us of the grandeur of the world around us.

It is to visitors such as these that I would ask you to open the door of your minds now. It was not all chance that Abraham's visitors turned out to be angels. Abraham knew at once that they were good and honourable men; nor was it all chance that the old Roman couple I told you of happened to entertain a god. They must have had an idea that he was a person of good intentions. We are always seeing certain visitors approaching the door of our minds—these thoughts and ideas which come to us from time to time. Yes, and we all judge fairly well the character of these visitors. If we open the door of our minds to the pure and noble thoughts, we shall find that they have come as messengers from God to do us good. Let our minds then be 'the home of fair visions and noble thoughts,' as Henry Drummond's was, and when our guests leave us they will not leave us poorer but richer. We shall know then that we have been entertaining angels unawares. And, more than that, although these guests of ours, when they leave us, may not take the form of a great picture or a beautiful poem, what does it matter if they are observed to be courteous words and kindly deeds—for that is what our thoughts are when they leave us, no longer thoughts but words and deeds.

The Christian Year.

Easter Day.

Joy.

'That my joy might remain in you.'—Jn 15^{11}.
'And your joy no man taketh from you.'—Jn 16^{22}.

1. *The Note of the Church's Festivals.*—The three great festivals of the Christian Church are those which celebrate the birth of the Son of God into the world, His victory over death, and the descent of the Holy Spirit. What was the significance of this choice of the three great days on which we are bidden by the Church to be joyous and thankful? What were the three great festivals of the Jewish year? They were the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The first of these fell at the vernal equinox; the second at the end of the early Eastern harvest; the third at the end of the vintage. They seem to be old agricultural festivals, made more sacred by being connected with great events in the national history. This is the history of most religious festivals all over the world; they are connected with the seasons of the year and with cherished memories in a nation's history. 'They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest,' says Isaiah, 'and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.' We ourselves have felt the want of a day to celebrate the joy of harvest, and as our harvest falls in the Church's dead season we have established everywhere an unauthorized festival in the autumn, which, in the popular estimation, ranks with the great days of the Church's calendar.

Easter, too, is popularly regarded as a spring festival. We decorate our churches with spring flowers; while Christmas has a peculiar character as the feast of family affection, the festival of home—a word so dear to us all. But the Church was guided by other reasons in choosing her three great days. They commemorate the three stages in the redemption of mankind, and the foundation of Christ's Church. There are no more majestic passages in the New Testament than the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John.

The glad tidings of great joy were of joy that sprang out of pain, loss, and disappointment. That is really the keynote of the Epistle to the Hebrews; the Fathers to whom God spake through their prophets in times past had all their dearest hopes disappointed. They saw Israel conquered and enslaved. They died in faith, not having received the promises, nor were the promises ever fulfilled as they hoped.

The Christian Church was born amid the death-throes of Jewish nationalism. All the hopes which the patriotic Jew associated with the name of David, and the hope of a Messiah, had to be surrendered before he could accept the true Son of David, the true Messiah, as his lord and king. He dreamed of a great conqueror. 'Gird thee with thy sword, and with thy thigh, O thou most mighty.' That was the dream; and the fulfilment was a

Babe lying in a manger. If we turn to Easter we find the same thing. Easter celebrates the victory of Christ over death. But was not this also a joy that sprang out of bitter sorrow, again following cruel loss and disappointment? The joy which the Mother of Jesus felt when she saw her Babe was a joy which had its roots in the pains of childbirth. The joy which she felt when she saw Him, or heard that others had seen Him after His resurrection, was a joy that had its root in a deeper pain. The sword had pierced through her very soul when she saw her Son dying on the cross.

Our third great festival has the same character. 'It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you.' Think of the desolation which the disciples felt when they had lost their Master for the second time. He had gone away, leaving them lonely. And then came the gift of the Holy Spirit to take His place, never again to leave them. That is what our Lord meant when He said, 'I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.' Now, it is no accident that all our great festivals should have this character. Not joy simply, not mere light-hearted rejoicing, like the joy of harvest, or as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. Each commemorates a joy that sprang out of the heart of a sorrow; a birth after travail pangs; a resurrection after a bitter death; a new kind of intimacy after a tragic parting. This is always the character of Christian joy. It is the deepest secret of Christianity.[1]

2. *Christ's Joy.*—But we know more about this joy. It is not only joy after pain. It is Christ's Joy. The world has never been able to understand the joy of Jesus Christ or even to believe in it. The general world and the Church alike have known Him as the Man of Sorrows, and it would surprise and shock many good Christians to hear Him spoken of as the joyous Saviour, as the Man of joy. In fact, that larger, deeper element has been overlooked because it was both too deep and too unearthly for the superficial eye.

The favours of fortune, the flatteries of ambition, the caresses of wealth had no place in His daily path. Externally it was such a life as the least favoured of mortals would not change for his own. Externally it was a rough, hard, bare, pinched life with no bright colours on its face, and no romance to paint its sky. And yet underneath all that was a very heavenful of what He called joy, as much deeper than pleasure as the ocean is deeper than a pool. His joy was the wonderful thing in Christ's life. A river of satisfaction clear as crystal, running to ceaseless music and never running low. His one wish was that all whom He loved might have it. 'That my joy might remain in you.'

Was Christ's joy part of the mystery of His divine nature and therefore beyond human comprehension? No: it could not be altogether that, or He would hardly have prayed that we might be sharers in it. Indeed, He Himself has told us in part what it was and whence it came. First He walked continually in heavenly places. This earth was to Him a part of the Father's house, and in the very presence of the Father He lived and moved and had His being.

No less certain is it that He had an inexhaustible source of joy in the grandeur, depth, and infinite fulness of His own sweet human love. His love for the disciples whom He trained. His love for the multitude whom He taught. His love for the sinners whom He pitied and forgave. His love for the diseased and sorrowful whom He healed and lightened of their woes, and for every child of man on whom His eyes rested. Men were all more or less dear to Him and lovable, and His heart was a fountain of pity, sympathy, and yearning affection.

3. *Our Joy.*—Christ longed above all things to give His joy to the men whom He had chosen, and, in fact, to all who should hereafter call Him Master. He regarded it as the highest attainment of the Christian, and a possible attainment of every Christian life.

There is everything in our Christian faith to make us glad if we truly hold it and do not merely think we hold it. It speaks to us through Christ's lips in uniformly cheerful tones. It asks the weary to come into its rest. It tells the anxious that all their cares are in God's heart. To the young it promises immortal youth, to the old renewal of hope and everlasting strength. To those who have failed it whispers of coming victory, to those who have been broken and bruised by sin it speaks of forgiveness and recovery. To all who are working to make the world better it sings infinite good cheer, and to those who are dejected because of the world's sadness and woes it sounds always the same clarion note of better things, and to all of us it keeps on affirming through every doubt that the world is God's world, and He loves it and never leaves it,

[1] W. R. Inge in *Christian World Pulpit*, cv. 1.

and all must be well in the end. That is the joy which Jesus gives, and no man can take it from us. There is nothing else of which that can be said. Most things are precarious enough. Happiness comes and goes and never stays long. Pleasures are the hobby of a day or the fashion of a season. Reputation and honour are at the mercy of every popular wind that blows. Wealth goes when death comes, if not before. But the joy which Christ gives is secure as heaven itself. No freaks of man or changes of fortune can touch that. It is hid with Christ in God beyond the reach of harm.[1]

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

The Potencies of Faith.

'For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'—1 Jn 5^4.

This was the text which moved William Penn, Mr. Boreham says. When William Penn was managing his father's estate at Cork, the Quaker, Thomas Loe, came there, and Penn attended his meetings. 'It was in this way,' he tells us, 'that God, in His everlasting kindness, guided my feet in the flower of my youth, when about two-and-twenty years of age. He visited me with a certain testimony of His eternal Word through a Quaker named Thomas Loe.' The text at that memorable and historic service, like a nail in a sure place, fastened itself upon the mind of the young officer. Thomas Loe preached from the words: 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'

The victory that overcometh the world! What is the world? The Puritans talked much about the world; and Penn was the contemporary of the Puritans. Cromwell died just as the admiral, Penn's father, was preparing to send his son to Oxford. Whilst, at Cork, Penn sat listening to Thomas Loe's sermon on the faith that overcometh the world, John Milton was putting the finishing touches to *Paradise Lost*, and John Bunyan was languishing in Bedford Gaol. Each of the three had something to say about the world. To Cromwell it was, as he told his daughter, 'whatever cooleth thine affection after Christ.' Bunyan gave his definition of the world in his picture of Vanity Fair. Milton likened the world to an obscuring mist—a fog that renders dim and indistinct the great realities and vitalities of life. It is an atmosphere that chills the finest delicacies and sensibilities of the soul. It is too subtle and too elusive to be judged by external appearances. In his fine treatment of the world, Bishop Alexander cites, by way of illustration, still another of the contemporaries of William Penn. He paints a pair of companion pictures. He depicts a gay scene at the frivolous and dissolute Court of Charles the Second; and, beside it, he describes a religious assembly of the same period. The first gathering appears to be altogether worldly: the second has nothing of the world about it. Yet, he says, Mary Godolphin lived her life at Court without being tainted by any shadow of worldliness, whilst many a man went up to those solemn assemblies with the world raging furiously within his soul![2]

To the spirit of evil there is always opposed, in unceasing conflict, 'whatsoever is born of God.' All spiritual aspiration, all moral passion, all endeavour after righteousness, all sacrifice for human well-being are born of God. The inspiration and strength of all these moral and spiritual energies is faith, which is the first-born of God within the soul. Faith, then, faces the world, and it overcomes. It has three potencies: first, the potency of vision; second, the potency of venture; third, the potency of victory.

1. *Faith as Vision.*—By vision is meant a perception of truths hidden from unenlightened eyes. Faith is contrasted with sight, which beholds the outward world of light and order and beauty. It is contrasted with knowledge, which is the mastery of the facts and laws of the visible world, and of the data of universal human experience. Faith is not to be contrasted with reason, for faith should be both reasoned and reasonable. But it rises above a mere intellectual apprehension of, an assent to, moral and spiritual truth. It has an environment of which multitudes are not aware, and a consciousness of a Personality whose shadow some men have never seen upon the path. Faith is an impassioned consent of the soul in its prospect of the spiritual world.

Now the strength and force of faith as vision depends upon the range of the horizon. Some men have faith only in righteousness. They believe that we live under the governance of immutable moral laws. They deny that victory lies with the big battalions. We have never lacked these believers in righteousness. In the autobiography of John

[1] J. G. Greenhough, *Sunset Thoughts: or, Aftermath*, 55.

[2] F. W. Boreham, *A Handful of Stars*, 9.

Stuart Mill, in the penetrating portraitures of George Meredith, in the high and serious writings of John Morley, we have the steadfast assertion of a faith in righteousness, solemn, austere, controlling. There are men who have attained to no other faith, but they stand among us clothed upon with integrity and fidelity.

There are others who believe in the unseen. Faith in righteousness is merely a conviction of the supremacy of moral law. Faith in the unseen is an assurance that the world is not only under a reign of law, but is a part of a spiritual order. It is a belief not merely in such things unseen as love and truth, but in forces invisible which bear in upon men's spirits and affect their destinies.

Among them there stand Emerson with his illuminating and inspiring aphorisms; Matthew Arnold with his pathetic poems, instinct with the awe of the eternal; and Browning who, as a believer in the revelation of God in Christ, strikes with a more steadfast constancy the note of certainty and of confidence in the unseen.

The highest reach of faith is to believe in a living God. That was the faith which distinguished the Hebrew from all other races, and gave him the spiritual leadership of the nations. That faith was consummated in the revelation of Jesus Christ. That disclosure of God in Christ may be realized if we think of a man moving within the darkened room of a man sunk in a deep slumber. When the sleeper awoke he was dimly conscious that another personality was not far from him, and he heard the coming and going of his breathing. As he arose, he listened intently as a soft footfall fell upon his ears. As he stood still in wonder a whisper seemed to vibrate softly upon the air. But he found the message of the whisper difficult to understand. Suddenly the shutters which darkened the room were flung back, the light streamed in, and he saw the face of one who looked upon him with infinite love and desire. It was he who had awakened him from his sleep, and was now eager to hold him in his embrace. 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.'

2. *Faith as Venture.*—Every man who has the vision passes on to make the venture. Even the man who believes in righteousness takes all its risks. He stakes his course and career on the certainty of the supremacy of righteousness in the world. The man who believes in the unseen makes the venture of resisting the coarse allurements of sense. He disdains the gratification of a callous greed or a sensual pleasure. But the man who has the vision of God makes more daring ventures. Like Abraham he goes out not knowing whither he goes.

In the simplest experience, and at every stage of life, the vision of faith passes into the venture. Principal Fairbairn, of Oxford, has described the venture of faith by recalling a reminiscence of his early childhood. 'As a little child I have trembled to cross at night the courtyard of a lonely country mill. Every little object that moonlight or starlight revealed to me in other than natural proportions was a source of fear, and seemed to hide shapes terrible to childish flesh and blood. But if my little hand was laid in the large hand of my father, I could cross the courtyard as gleefully and carelessly at night as at noonday.'

Many days of our life call for this venture. But there is one hour in which our vision passes on to its supreme and transforming experience. That is the hour on which a man, through faith in Christ Jesus, ventures his soul and its keeping, with his life, and its ordering, to Christ as Redeemer and Lord.

3. *Faith as Victory.*—The faith which is vision is not only venture in the critical choices of life, but it is victory throughout all the course of our years, and in the quiet level of every day's need. This does not mean that all our days will be a procession of triumph. It does not declare that the hopes of every loyal heart will be openly realized, and his testimony vindicated. There are times when 'the world' and its defiant powers of evil have their 'hour' and seem to prevail. That is the meaning of 'the trial of faith,' and to live in the world is a constant trial to every man who believes. But when faith endures the trial, it not only gains the victory, but it is the victory. Esther goes into the king's presence saying, 'If I perish, I perish.' She might have perished in her loyalty to God, but as she went in her faith was victory. The three Hebrew children went into the furnace of their affliction. Their victory was not achieved in the hour of their deliverance, but in the moment when they refused to bow the knee and accepted the penalty. The early martyrs who were slain in the arena seemed to have trusted God in vain. But even dull Roman consciences began to understand that these trembling men and women, who stood with uplifted eyes as they awaited the onset of the lions, were more than conquerors through their faith. The only peril of the believer is that which

Jesus anticipated when He said, 'I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.'[1]

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

Discouragement.

'He shall not fail nor be discouraged.'—Is 42^4.

In a hundred different ways discouragement of one kind or another thrusts its gloomy shadow across our path and chills our brightest days. Yet discouragement is about the hardest thing in the world to explain. Difficulty meets you squarely in the face, but discouragement haunts you. It is a kind of mental malaria, an insidious disease of the mind, sometimes chronic, sometimes acute, which poisons the will and paralyses its energies. That is what makes discouragement so often the vestibule of temptation. The discouraged man is ready to accept any relief, to take advantage of any open door that will deliver him from the intolerable pressure upon his soul.

In the old monasteries of Europe there was a species of mental or spiritual disease prevalent among the monks which was known by the name of *accidie*. In the Middle Ages this sin of *accidie* was so common that one of the fathers, Cassian, wrote an elaborate treatise upon it. What is accidie? Cassian defines it as disgust of soul or weariness of life.

There is no doubt a good deal of discouragement which is temperamental. Some people are born into the world at an angle at which they see everything under sable clouds. While they do no doubt serve a good purpose in restraining the unbalanced enthusiasm of sanguine people, at the same time they have a good deal to answer for in the way of adding to the depression of the world. But the sanguine temperament brings its discouragements. It is also true that a good many of our discouragements are dyspeptic in their origin. A little open-air exercise will do more than a religious service to chase away the blues for a good many of us. But the trouble with all this type of discouragement is that it is a contagious disease.

On the other hand, we must not forget—as indeed who can?—that there are a great many real discouragements in life which tax the faith and endurance of the bravest soul. They tax a man's grit and grace. There is no more striking example of a business discouragement which was so overcome that it became a positive blessing than that of Sir Walter Scott. When at the age of fifty-five he found himself a ruined man, through the failure of his publishers, he wrote, 'I feel neither dishonoured nor broken down by the news I have received. I have walked my last in the domain which I have planted, sat for the last time in the halls which I have built; but death would have taken them from me if misfortune had spared me.' We know how that spirit conquered. From the magic pen of the great writer flowed that marvellous series of works the profits of which not only bought back Abbotsford and enabled him to pay his creditors to the last penny, but created for him a deathless name in literature.

This reminds us of the *hidden blessings of discouragement*. It is a good thing for a man or woman to be thoroughly discouraged once in a while; and that for several reasons. First of all because discouragement is an excellent discipline in *humility*. Discouragement is the great antiseptic of all conceit.

Discouragements not only train us in humility, they test and develop the will. It is not enough to say that discouragements are inevitable. The truest view is that which sees them as a necessity as well. Some men are like drums, you never hear of them until they are beaten. The greatest things in life—the great thoughts, the great discoveries, the great philanthropies—have been nurtured in sorrow, wrought out through discouragement, and finally established with smiles. Yet in order that this may be so we must remember that it is one thing to have discouragements, but quite another thing to be discouraged. How, then, are we to overcome our discouragements in life?

1. Remember that *discouragement can never be to the man of faith a permanent condition*. A distinguished man of science once said that whenever in the course of his researches he encountered an apparently insuperable obstacle he invariably found himself upon the brink of some new discovery. For every soul beset with discouragements there is the Psalmist's words, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.'

2. *Remember* in hours of discouragement the *things that encourage*. Learn to see the things we can credit ourselves with before the mercy-seat of God. Learn, before all else, that while our dis-

[1] W. M. Clow, *The Evangel of the Strait Gate*, 163.

couragements can be counted on the fingers of one hand, our blessings are unnumbered. And often discouragements stand at the parting of the ways in life, pointing out a new path of duty.

3. Lastly, remember *the blessed power that comes through prayer.* Nothing so quickens the spirit of prayer as this feeling of discouragement. Prayer links us to Him in whose bright lexicon of duty there is no such word as fail. 'He shall not fail, nor be discouraged.'

What a triumphant note of hope these words are! From the human standpoint Christ did fail. In the world's judgment the Cross was the seal of His failure. Yet out of that symbol of defeat has proceeded the conquering spirit of mankind.[1]

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

The Almond Blossom.

'Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond-tree. Then said the Lord unto me, Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten my word to perform it.'—Jer $1^{11.12}$.

Shakespeare tells us that we may find 'tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything'; and in our text we may with Jeremiah find 'tongues in trees.' We are out in orchard and garden. 'The rod of an almond-tree' means a blossoming branch, a branch of the almond-tree covered with its lovely pink-white blossom. Such a sight is suggestive—it speaks—there are 'tongues in trees.'

Now what followed was possibly this, and thus the text comes in. Jeremiah was in the orchard at Anathoth that still summer evening when this call to be a prophet came upon him, when he had passed through such a spiritual experience as these earlier verses describe. Pausing entranced after the intense experience, the prophet realized that his eyes were turned steadily towards a blossoming almond-branch; and he realized too, as happens often at such times, that he had been looking at the thing before him unconsciously, with eyes that saw not. But when the strain passed, and the thing before his eyes was really seen, then there came a voice into his spirit—'Jeremiah, what seest thou? Jeremiah, what are you looking at?'—and like one in a dream he said, 'I am looking at the branch of an almond-tree.' Then said the Lord, 'Thou hast well seen, for I will hasten My word to perform it.'

[1] D. S. Mackay *The Religion of the Threshold*, 141.

The point of the passage is that there is a kind of play upon the word 'almond-tree' and the word 'watch,' for these two words are almost identical. An 'almond-tree' in Hebrew is *Shakĕd*, and it comes from the verb *Shakad*, which means 'to be sleepless' or 'to watch.' The tree is so called because it is the earliest blossoming tree in the East, the first to wake from its winter sleep.

'Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see the branch of a Waker; and Jehovah said to me, Thou hast well seen, for I am wakeful over my word to perform it.' Such is the parallel—'I see the branch of a Watcher; yes, for I watch over my word to perform it.'

So we can understand the prophet's vision. It is this habit of early wakefulness that is expressed by the Hebrew name of the tree, and when Jeremiah looked upon it that was the thought. If the tree, for this remarkable peculiarity, was a proverb of watching and waking, the sight of it, or a branch of it, with its white blossom, would be sufficient to suggest this idea. So thought Jeremiah, and God gave him the thought. Here is the emblem of wakefulness, and God says, 'I am wakeful, I keep watch over my word to perform it.'

This was the reassuring and inspiring thought which the blossoming almond-bough brought to Jeremiah. He was commanded to speak the word of One who slumbers not nor sleeps. In the end every word of His must be fulfilled to the last letter. Though the delay may be long like the winter sleep, and though the ears of men be dull of hearing, yet God will never speak in vain. 'I watch over my word to perform it.'

Is it not a lesson that comes to us every spring-time when the sleeping buds and seeds wake to life again? They have not been lost and buried and forgotten. God remembers them.

As we know very well, the ultimate value of any word must be determined by the character and intention of the person by whom it is spoken. We must take into account both the word and what lies behind the word. If a word is truth, then it lives; if it is spoken by a true man, if he who speaks it is sincere and sure and strong, then his word will be fulfilled.

Now it is in the direction of this thought that we find the teaching of the text. Jeremiah is brought to the conviction that he is commanded to speak a word which must be fulfilled, because it is God's word. The prophet's word might remain on the

earth seemingly as unproductive of any life as the twigs of an almond-tree in winter. But the breath of spring blows gently and genially upon it; and just as at the fit time the almond-tree burst into radiant life, covering itself with a snowy shower of lovely blossom, so in good time would the word sent forth from God prove its vitality and its power. It, too, would leap to life and blossom abundantly.

This is the message that encouraged the shrinking prophet at the beginning of his task—that his word is God's word, and therefore cannot fail—this truth that the will of God must be done and always is done, in the world that God has made and is making. He knows that, whatever be his own fortune, that word will go on conquering and to conquer till it has subdued all things to itself. So Jeremiah is strengthened at the beginning.

This, then, is the great thought of our text. We are here in the world, and the word of God is with us. It has come to us by His prophets and messengers. God's word is here in the world, and God is in the world with the word, watching over it to perform it. We may believe that what was said of the word of Jehovah by Jeremiah is true of every word that is a word of God.

'Heaven and earth shall pass away; my words shall not pass away.'

Where is there such a message as this in Christ? He tells of God the Father and His infinite mercy. He speaks of life and love, of sin and forgiveness, of rest. He tells of a way that leads to life, and a way whose end is death. What a word is here in Christ! Who will trust it, venture his life upon it, believing that this is the way of peace and blessedness and immortality? Do we really believe that, amid all the voices that assail our ears, there is one voice, that is the Voice Divine? 'God has spoken unto us by His Son.' [1]

[1] J. Rutherford, *The Seer's House*, 295.

Hinduism and Christianity: Some Points of Contact and Divergence.

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I.

The study of Hinduism is indeed a study not of one religion but of all the religions, as set in the Indian environment and influenced by the Indian atmosphere. Its history is a history of all the toil and struggle of the human spirit, seeking God. For that reason it is a study that should stir in us, the deeper we probe it, a profound emotion. The more clearly its outlines emerge before us from the dust and haze of the long centuries of its history, whether we perceive it as the thought-product of the minds of ancient sages brooding over the mysteries of life and death and God in their desert solitudes, or as the movement in the heart of an unlettered peasant bowing before a red-painted stone, the more we feel every instinct of easy criticism and contempt changed to sympathy and respect. From the same root of aspiration have sprung, not only gross and cruel superstition, but profound and passionate conjecture as to God. Hinduism is a strange, formidable, sometimes monstrous, thing, but it is never contemptible, as nothing is contemptible that is the product of deep feeling or deep thought. We must always endeavour to understand it even when it seems to us most fantastic. Sir Alfred Lyall was a student of Hinduism who realized much of its breadth and variety and mystery. He compares it in one passage to 'a troubled sea, without shore or visible horizon, driven to and fro by the winds of boundless credulity and grotesque invention.' If we are to understand the sick heart of India, and are to be enabled, in the name and by the power of Christ, to heal it, we must mark its history and listen to its cries and its complaints as we have them written large for us in strange hieroglyphics in this religion.

If Hinduism, then, is a mosaic of almost all the types and stages of religious aspiration, Christianity should be able, as no other religion can, to furnish the key to its understanding in all its divers aspects,